DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 232 106 CG 016 800

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TITLE SCRIPT: A Skill Development Procedure for Training Group Counselors.
PUB DATE Oct 81
NOTE 9p.
PUB TYPE Reports - Descriptive (141)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS *Counselor Training; Experiential Learning; *Group Counseling; Group Dynamics; Group Therapy; *Leadership Training; Professional Education; Program Descriptions; Role Playing; Simulation; *Training Methods

ABSTRACT

A basic problem in preparing group counseling leaders is providing an instructional program which gives both information about group work and experience in leading groups. The Structured Counseling Role Interpersonal Phased Transactions (SCRIPT) format attempts to reduce this problem. Frequently, students are required or expected to participate in a counseling group in order to learn group leadership skills; SCRIPT attempts to avoid the role ambiguity and other problems inherent in such a requirement by using simulation or role playing exercises. As a structured experience, SCRIPT permits many behaviors inherent in a group to occur spontaneously, demonstrating to students that, while group process generalizations exist, each group experience has its own characteristics. SCRIPT is based on the assumption that group development is sequential and thematic in nature; this focus helps students differentiate between natural and therapeutic interactions. A SCRIPT role-play generally proceeds as follows: the general purpose and developmental stage of the group are identified; students secretly choose a personality structure to role-play, a leader (either student or instructor) is chosen; and the episode is videotaped and later analyzed. This process helps students understand the group procedures discussed in didactic courses. (WAS)

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ED232106

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October 1981

CG 016800

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SCRIPT A skill development procedure for training group counselors

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The principal focus of this paper is to describe the development of SCRIPT and to show how it can be used in preparing group counseling leaders. SCRIPT is an acronym that stands for Structured Counseling Role Interpersonal Phased Transactions. The SCRIPT format enhances the learning about group work as well as facilitating the development of group skills.

One of the basic probelms in preparing group counseling leaders is that of providing an instructional program that readily provides information about group work as well as experiences in leading groups. Many training programs assume that skills (i.e., how to intervene in the life of a group) are best acquired through membership in a counseling group whose goal is personal growth of its members. Studies have shown that the mixing of two objectives (personal growth and skill development) in one experience lead to poor results because students do not know what roles to identify in the group: trainee, client, member, observer, or leader. Yalom (1975) has described additional problems that have arisen in groups made up of students meeting a program requirement. Among them are: low level risk taking, lack of personal disclosure, silence, passivity, and dependence. It is most difficult to learn leadership skills when the above problems are present in a group.

The required membership in a counseling group raises the following question: Can an institution ethically and legally require attendance at an activity whose main purpose is personal change. There has been no formal

resolution of this issue. In recent years there has been a movement towards voluntary group participation with a strong institutional expectation that students will volunteer for group therapy if they expect to graduate from the program.

An alternative to the above practices is to design a seminar that uses simulation or role playing exercises as a means of helping students acquire the necessary counseling skills. A properly designed seminar would be a useful adjunct to content-oriented courses. It is difficult to become proficient in a skill just by reading about it.

A simulation is a structured experience that is predicated on a model that reflects the essential elements of reality. In the case of group counseling, the model should contain those features of the process that experts deem significant. The group behavior in the simulation should be comparable to that in a real therapeutic setting.

SCRIPT as a structured experience permits many behaviors that are inherent in a group to occur in a spontaneous manner. Because it relies on the creative nature of students, it does not produce identical interaction patterns from one use to another. The lack of replication has value because it demonstrates to the students that, although it is possible to generalize about the group process, each group experience has its own characteristics. The apparent occurrence of random transaction within the simulation further demonstrates to students that it is important for a group leader to "feel" the ebb and flo of group interactions rather than to rely on theory as to what should be happening in the group.

The concept of stages of group development is useful in building a model of group counseling because theorists have delineated the types of behaviors that take place at each stage. The nature of group development

can be conceptualized as cyclical or sequential (Cohen and Smith, 1976). The latter assumes that a group works through a series of issues or themes in a sequential pattern and that a resolution of an issue implies that a group is ready to move to the next phase while the former postulates that certain isses or themes will continue to surface in various forms throughout the life of the group.

SCRIPT is based on the assumption that group development is sequential in nature and that certain issues or themes will occur at specific points. The basic reason for selecting the sequential concept is that it is easier for simulation participants to implement it. Since a typcial SCRIPT episode lasts about ten minutes, it is difficult to enact the complex notion of reoccurring themes. Focus on specific issues engenders a natural interaction pattern among the participants and elicits behaviors needed to resolve the dilemma presented by the issue or theme.

Cohen and Smith (1976) suggest that theme topics represent molar events in the life of a group. The theme characterizes the pattern of interaction within the group at a given point of development. Thus it is possible to delineate the behavior of the leader and members at given stages of development. SCRIPT uses a number of traditional themes as one of the elements in structuring an episode.

The focus on themes helps students to differentiate between natural and therapeutic interactions (Eagan, 1971). Natural interactions are those that take place in social and task oriented groups and focus on such themes as cohesiveness, power, influence, role differentiation, and leadership. On the other hand, therapeutic interactions focus on self-exploration, self-expression, expression of feeling, and confrontation.

Natural interactions are a necessary factor in facilitating work in a counseling group but it is the therapeutic interactions that bring about behavioral change. By means of video tape (instant reply) it is possible for SCRIPT participants to identify the types of interactions that took place in the episode.

The personality structure of a group member as well as the nature of his or her concerns affect the interaction patterns that transpire, within a group. Leary (1957) has develpoed a concept of personality that readily lends itself for prescribing personality attributes for role playing. Leary devised a procedure for classifying interpersonal responses and the relationship among them. The classification system has two dimensions, love-hate and dominance-submission, that are grouped into four quadrants around a circular space. A SCRIPT participant selects a quadrant as his or her basic personality (ex. hate-dominance) and uses that through the episode. The Leary system provides the participant with a "theatrical mask" that helps him or her act out the requisite behaviors without feeling that something personal is being disclosed. The students tend to be more comfortable enacting a role than being themselves.

A review of SCRIPT (Appendix A) shows that a number of factors other than theme and personality are found in them. Classroom use has shown that students interaction is better than the SCRIPT dimensions are reduced to a minimum. Students believe that there are too many things to keep in mind in a complex SCRIPT thus affecting their spontaneity. In most instances each participant secretly selects the personality structure to be used during the episode and notes some personal attributes. The general purpose of the group and the stage of development are identified before the secret selection. The leader of the group may be a classmember or an experienced therapist.

The purpose of the video playback is not to rate the enactment of roles but to analyze the group process. The role playing and analysis helps students to better understand the group procedures discussed in didactic courses.

SCRIPT is a useful adjunct in counselor training programs for it provides a means of skill development without causing undue concern among students. When combined with instant replay it is a powerful tool for developing group counseling skills.

Cohen, A. and Smith, R. The critical incident in growth groups, La Jolla, Calif. University Assc., Inc., 1976.

Eagan, G. Encounter: Group process for interpersonal growth, Belmont, Calif.: Brooks/Cole. 1971.

Leary, T. Interpersonal diagnosis of personality, N.Y. Roland, 1957.

Yalom, I. The theory and practice of group psychotherapy, N.Y., Basic Books, 1975.

SCRIPT - I

PERSONAL HISTORY

Self

significant others

reference group

things & ideas

achievements

failures

fears

values

attitudes

EXTRA GROUP DATA

Home

Work-school

friends

parents

significant others

things

places

GROUP

INITIAL STAGE

__Orientation __Dependency __Testing

__Hesitant Participation __Search for Meaning

THEMES

__Dependency (Authority and leader relations)

__Interdependence (Acceptance and Personal Relations)

__Goal (Why are we here and Why I am here)

Time Frame

__Here and Now __Then and There __Future

INDIVIDUAL __

Lifestyle

__Negative Active (Dominate, boast, reject threaten compete, mock punish attack, condemn)

__Negative Passive (unappreciative, complain, resist passively, demand, accuse, self-critical, submit)

__Postive active (Lead, teach, inform, advise, support, sympathize, love approve)

__Positive passive (Loves being praised, cooperates, agrees, trusts, asks for help, asks for opinion)

Communication

__Stereotyped, restricted, exploring, sizing up group

search for similarities, giving advice, seeking advice

Identity Poor self concept_____Knows self

Ambiguity tolerance low_____High

Basic role behavior

__Task specialist (independent, goal oriented, ideas not feeling)
at not talks at not to individuals, jokes, disagrees

__Social oriented (dependent, needs support and acceptance, passive)
reactive, polite, respectful, expressive, small talk

__Self-oriented (ego-centrio, introspective, seriousness, competitive, agressive

Integrated (interdependnet, integrative, open, expressive, talks to people, supportive